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Frank Dunkle—Director of the Montana Fish and Game Department.

Director's Column

A New Monthly Mailing To Sportsmen

This new bulletin—"Montana Outdoors"—will be mailed monthly to interested sportsmen throughout the state. We hope to follow each commission meeting with a bulletin to give Montana sportsmen an idea of current commission events and to talk about various programs that are going on throughout the state. We know that after you have looked this over, you may have additional questions on some of the topics discussed, so any member of our department would be most happy to visit with your group or club to discuss with you some of the ideas brought forth in this new bulletin.

We certainly hope that this will be an opportunity for the Fish and Game Commission and the Department to keep you, the sportsmen, better informed on department activities and the fish and game picture.

One other thing, we hope that after you have read this bulletin you will pass it on to other people. If you have friends who would like to be placed on the mailing list for this bulletin, please have them drop a postcard to the Montana Fish & Game Department, Helena, Montana and mark it—attention "Montana Outdoors" bulletin. We'll look forward to visiting with you through this bulletin each month.

Frank H. Dunkle

Game Management

The Sun River Elk Herd

This year as you will remember in talking about elk in hunting district 42 (Sun River area), it was decided after consultation with many people, that the area should be broken into two parts. The Sun River was the dividing line. It was decided also that a quota of 400 elk should come from this herd and we should take about 100 from the lower part of 42, that area south of the Sun River, and 300 from the area north of the Sun River in area 42.

You will recall that six days after the elk season opened in area 42 the quota of 100 elk was reached in the southern area. The reason for the smaller quota in the southern portion of area 42 is that we feel that herd is in real good shape. The cows are of a good age, the calf crop is coming up, and it would appear that this herd has had sufficient pressure for awhile and we should relax on it a little bit.

Hunting regulations must presently differ for separate segments of the Sun River area.

This is not true in the northern half. These elk have historically come out of the preserve and the back country late. The hunting pressure has been rather light and it is time that this herd is rather intensively harvested for a year or two in order to get a younger, more productive herd. This benefit would be felt in terms of more calf production —and this would mean more annual elk production.

We know that when a herd is pretty intensively harvested the calf crop begins to come up. This has been noted in the Highwoods, it has been noted in the Missouri River breaks and of course the northern Yellowstone herd has already shown reaction to better harvest.

Some years ago the park service began a reduction of the Northern Yellowstone elk and wanted to hold that herd somewhere around 5,000. Then, as the herd was reduced, more forage was available to the remaining elk so that production has increased to where we are finding somewhere between 40 to 60 calves per 100 cows. This is the kind of production we would like to see in the Sun River—both in the northern and southern units.

At any rate, it was determined that the quota should be taken. We then ran the season for the regular time through November 28th. We had laid out a program that called for the use of special permits at a later date or on a reopening. This herd could have been very adequately managed and harvested had the department been afforded flexibility. The season could have been extended for about five more days in the northern part of 42, and all would have gone well. There would have been no need for a reopening. This would have benefited Montana hunters who were in the area hunting and those who could still get away to hunt. It would have benefited the outfitting industry in the area also. The outfitters had their horses and their people there and they could have gone ahead with the hunt.

The area was reopened, and the department issued some 400 permits. Of the 400 permit holders, less than half showed up to hunt. Elk were in the open area, but still in the back country. Forty some elk were harvested. This season is now closed and we are looking forward to next year. We hope to use the best management tools that are available to the department and commission. These would include extension if desirable, or reopening on special permits. What sportsmen are looking for is the opportunity to hunt elk and the largest number of elk possible in-so-far as they are compatible with the range and other land uses. Many times with a few less adult animals and with a higher calf crop, we can have even better hunting.

The Sun River hunt has come to an end. Hunters took roughly 300 elk. We had hoped a quota of 400 would be reached. There were many good days' recreation in the field. The department will be watching developments carefully so that we can expect, as sportsmen, a very excellent season next year from the Sun River.

Gardiner

During the last month there has been considerable interest expressed by sportsmen throughout the state concerning a hunt in the Gardiner area. As most everybody knows, the National Park Service, after a survey of the Northern Yellowstone herd, has concluded that there is to be a reduction of 2500 elk from the northern elk herd. These elk are to be removed from the Park by a trapping and transplanting program. There is one other method of reducing the herd and that is by hunters during the general hunting season outside the park. In addition, there is a study concerned with elk migration and elk food habits in the park and also an additional one concerning the reproduction of elk. Over a period of a year, in excess of a 100 to 150 elk are taken as a part of these investigations. I am sure that any information you might want on these studies is available to you from the National Park Service in Yellowstone National Park.

The National Park Service has had requests for elk from nearly every state. They have placed these requests on a priority listing which numbers 800 or better. Some applications have been on hand for as much as 10 years. The park will fill these quotas and then remaining elk will be evenly distributed between Wyoming and Montana.

The other part of the program in the Yellowstone will materialize if the winter becomes more severe and the elk move out of the park. If elk do move out in sufficient numbers and are available, a season will be declared. The first couple days will be on a permit basis and after that hunting will be open for anybody who has a valid 1965 elk tag until the complete quota of elk are taken from the Northern Yellowstone elk herd. If the quota is not taken by hunters, trapping of elk for transplanting priorities in Montana and Wyoming will be undertaken. Montana does have firm commitments for 300 elk at this time and we have other transplant agreements being drawn with the Forest Service and private landowners that will probably bring the figure around 500 to 700. Consequently, what happens on the Gardiner area depends a great deal on the weather. On the one hand, the Park may be able to go ahead with their trapping program in order to meet the transplanting commitments and if the weather is more severe elk will be moving out of the park and become available for a hunting season.

Several folks in the Gardiner area have suggested the possibility of trapping elk, transplanting them outside of the park and then opening a season on the transplants. This would require written agreements with the landowners in the area and with the Forest Service. The department is looking into this and will be working on it if there is a real need for it.

Gallatin

It might be well to review the Upper Gallatin situation just a little bit and discuss the plan that has been worked up to satisfy some of the needs for elk management in the area.

A peculiar thing about the Upper Gallatin elk herd is that it summers almost entirely in Yellowstone Park and winters in Montana, for the most part on national forest land. The herd spends part of its time in the Park and then as the winter progresses the elk move back and forth in the northern extremities of the park and into Montana. The Gallatin range has shown some real problems from too many elk over the last 50 years. I think that it has been graphically and pictorially shown from the records that a problem has existed. Two years ago, the department, commission, sportsmen, the Park Service and the Forest Service all sat down again to talk about what could be done to remedy this situation and insure Montana of a huntable elk herd in this area. Sportsmen groups agreed this time to a base herd of

Special elk seasons are often required to take surpluses of elk that summer in Yellowstone Park and are available to hunters only when severe weather drives them out of the park into lower areas.

1000 animals and an agreement to this effect was drawn with the Forest Service, the Park Service and the Fish & Game Commission. These are the three legal subdivisions of government charged with the responsibility of managing these elk. 1000 animals were agreed on to be a base herd for several years, so the range could be watched to see if it might improve. It was felt that this number of animals could be handled in a thrifty nature on the range. Last year I think you will recall that the elk (some 750) were taken by hunters. Many people felt that a season with the deep snow would result in a slaughter from road hunters. Others felt that any pressure on the elk would push them back into the snow where the calves would be lost and animals starve to death. However, these dire predictions did not come to pass. The calf crop the past spring was a very good one. We had very little loss of animals last year after the hunting season and the hunters who participated in the hunt know that the elk weren't shot alongside the highway. Hunters put on their snowshoes and hiked back after the elk. This made for a good recreational hunt.

The first hunting was done up against the Park line and then progressed north toward Porcupine. This had several added benefits. It moved elk down on to other range. It pushed elk below the west fork and we got a very excellent distribution over the winter range. This hunt was handled on a permit system and hunters were assigned areas and time periods. This was because of the very restricted area and we did not want a firing line situation. The same type of hunt has been projected for the Gallatin again this year. The department has been flying distribution counts over the area in order to watch the elk as they move out of the high country. The 20th of this month a distribution count was flown and 1491 elk were counted outside the park.

Right on the heels of this, working in with the program, we got together with several of the clubs and asked them to furnish someone to help count, and we will run a cooperative count as soon as the weather permits. Three helicopters will be used with a sportsman and a department or park man in each one of the helicopters counting the elk. As the choppers land, the counts will be tallied and thus the number of elk in the area will be determined. The plan calls for a permit drawing to be held in Helena. Applications will be taken by mail, and a predetermined number of the permit holders will be allowed into the hunting area for a given period of time. This will reduce the possibilities of hunter accidents and make for a less congested hunt. The season will be run for approximately two weeks and then closed.

Under this system, we can take a harvest of elk that are not available during the regular season and we can control the kill. We know that by keeping a thrifty herd we will have an increased calf crop and we sportsmen can expect more elk for recreation in the forthcoming years. However, nothing will be done until the cooperative count is completed and a decision made on the number of elk that should be harvested.

There is one other program going on in the Gallatin that is of interest to all sportsmen, and that is the trapping and banding program being done in cooperation with the Park Service. We had hoped that during these migration studies about 250 elk might be neck-banded from three segments of the herd. These include the part of the herd that moves early in the year, the center part of the herd, and the very end of it. We would like to know where those elk are going. We are suspicious that some are moving across the divide into the Madison to winter. Some of these elk go to the Porcupine, others into Taylor Fork, and others stay in the Teepee-Buffalo Horn area. If we can know where these elk go and what their movement pattern is, we can better know how to hunt them. It would be disastrous to shoot all of the elk out of the first segment that moves out of the Park. By learning general movement patterns of the herd as it breaks up, we can determine how to harvest it. In other words, we take a few out of

Porcupine, a few out of Taylor Fork and a few out of the Teepee-Buffalo Horn groups. In this way we don't disrupt the movement of the herd and we can get a good distribution of the harvest.

This year we were extremely successful as at this date we have tagged, from two segments and part of the third segment, 308 elk. These bands can be observed all year and we will know where the elk are going, so it would appear that we are going to know a lot more about the movements of this herd than we have ever had the opportunity to know before. It will give us the basis to compare movement of elk and the range they are using. By tying these together with good sound judgment and cooperation with the sportsmen, the landowners and the other agencies, we can be assured that elk will be in the Gallatin for recreation use for a good many years to come.

1966 Hunting Seasons

It's probably a good idea to review the Fish and Game Commission's procedure for setting next year's seasons. The general opening dates were set by the commission during the January meeting for the early seasons to open September 15. These are the back country hunts where you either go in early or you don't go at all because of snow and weather conditions. These have been historically opened on the 15th. The next season dates to be set were for general opening. The commission determined that the 4th Sunday in October would be a good opening for general deer and elk hunting. This was set for a three-year period, so you can count on the next three years for the back country opening on September 15th and the general season opening on the 4th Sunday of October. That would mean the 23rd of October for 1966. This gives people an opportunity to plan vacations and to set their affairs in order so that they can take advantage of the first day of hunting.

Along with this, of course, there are some special areas to be considered. Some of the areas along the Idaho border and some of the areas near Yellowstone Park require a special date. Some of these were set at the January meeting and some will be set later.

In February the commission will tentatively decide on hunting district boundaries and opening dates for individual districts.

After opening dates and boundaries are set in a tentative manner by the commission, the information is mailed out to the sportsmen's groups, landowner groups, and other interested folks who are very closely associated with fish and game seasons. After these are reviewed, field people from our department will meet with all of the groups and discuss these tentative seasons so that the commission may benefit from the feeling and thinking of sportsmen who are going to participate in the seasons and the landowners who will be involved.

This information is returned and at the March meeting the commission reviews the comments by all groups and recommendations of the department. Final opening dates and boundaries are then determined and commission action is taken to make them permanent. Seasons are set in this way so the work can begin on the big game map and regulations that are so necessary to sportsmen.

The next step then is to set the closing dates, bag limits and the quotas for the special season animals —moose, sheep, goats and antelope. Here again, the closing dates and bag limits for all the areas on elk and deer and for the special season animals, and boundary descriptions for special season animals go out in a tentative manner to the sportsmen's groups for their consideration. Again we talk with all these groups to see what their thinking is and to furnish to the sportsmen the information that we have collected in our field studies.

All of the comments from the groups are presented to the commission and they must determine from the comments of the sportsmen, landowners, and the department recommendations what is the best season. The seasons are set with the interests of the resource in mind, knowing we can only have as many game animals as the land will support, and knowing further that we cannot have so many game animals that the ranching industry is jeopardized. We try to have as many animals as the range will support, so they are not in conflict with other interests and so that the numbers will support sufficient hunting recreation to all Montanans and their guests.

You can look forward to the season setting that goes on for the next three or four months, knowing it is the wish of the commission that the people in the state have an opportunity to review the seasons and make their comments in order that a well-founded and proper season can be set in the best interests of the game and the sportsmen.

A view of some of the boat docks at the Fish and Game's recently acquired recreation area on Finley Point, Flathead Lake.

RECREATION AND PARKS

State Plan

Late in August the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation contacted the Fish and Game Commission and indicated that if the proper statewide recreation program were submitted, projects could then be approved and ready for construction and development by the spring construction season. Such a plan was pretty well underway due to the efforts of the Governor's advisory committee and

other agencies working closely with the Fish and Game Department. This information was put together and it then became a state plan for the orderly development of outdoor recreation in Montana.

This plan was submitted to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and approved in November, making the state eligible for development monies in excess of $1,000,000. This money is matched on a 50-50 basis —50% by organizations and agencies and 50% furnished through the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The money comes from the sale of the recreation sticker.

The areas that are primarily considered are the city, county, and state agencies. There is an area for private development which is now being explored and will be included in the state plan. As it stands, the money is allocated 25% to cities, 25% to counties and 50% to state agencies. This money can be used for acquisition of land as well as development of areas.

To date the state has a plan—it must continually be updated—and all agencies are working closely to get this program underway so that Montana can benefit.

Projects:

To date, five of 14 projects that have been submitted by the Montana Fish and Game Commission have been approved. One is for acquisition and development of a state park area on the west shore of Flathead Lake, and five other state park areas will also be upgraded and new facilities will be added. The development will include picnic and camping areas, sanitary facilities, water systems, boat launching sites, construction of interior roads and parking, shelters, protective fencing, and signs. Some of the areas that are included in these projects, other than the acquisition project on the west shore of Flathead Lake, are Deadman's Basin recreation area near Harlowton, the Canyon Ferry Reservoir recreation area near Helena, the James Kipp state park between Lewistown and Malta, Tiber recreational area near Chester, and the Painted Rocks Reservoir on the west fork of the Bitterroot in Ravalli county. The approval of these projects will enable the state of Montana to upgrade these parks where existing facilities are inadequate to meet the needs of Montana citizens and out-of-state visitors. The rehabilitation and addition of facilities will bring these parks up to an acceptable standard and this is what we want to see in Montana. We want a state parks system that is second to none.

In addition to the five projects that were submitted and approved, we have other projects pending that would develop other state parks. We have one project that would update eleven fishing access sites. Other projects include one on the Townsend city park that has been submitted and is near approval, one for the city of Billings, one for the city of Great Falls to build three swimming pools and another for the updating and development of the city park in Malta.

As these projects are submitted and returned with approval, Montana can get underway for the development of recreation. This is one of the big businesses in Montana and one that will have real economic impact on the growth of the state.

Prime waterways, if protected now, may well be one of tomorrow's greatest treasures.

STATE WATERWAYS

The commission approved an approach to the waterways program in Montana and they directed the department to bring recommendations to them for several major areas. The Yellowstone Waterway from Yellowstone Park to east of Billings is under close consideration. It has been designated as a state waterway and is important because it is one of the routes followed by Lewis and Clark. It is a free-flowing stream and has great recreation potential. Access areas are being developed along this waterway in connection with various communities and with the Forest Service. This will provide opportunity for sportsmen to fish and float the Yellowstone River for various periods including one-day trips, two-day trips, and three-day trips. This will also assure people of areas where they may picnic and camp. The same type of approach will be used on several other rivers. We will be sampling these rivers for fisheries production and for access opportunities. The Madison, the Big Hole, and Rock Creek, which is near Missoula, are the three areas at the moment under close consideration. The commission has also asked that we explore the area from Fort Benton to Fort Peck in connection with the other plans that are being developed and fostered by several other groups.

No river will be named for inclusion into the waterway system until it has been thoroughly mapped and considered. In this way we will be sure that the best opportunities will be taken to provide sportsmen with fishing and access.

HUNTER SAFETY

At the last commission meeting we were informed by the National Rifle Association that Montana has been included in the 50,000 club. This is a club sponsored by the National Rifle Association for states that have trained 50,000 young people in safe hunting practices. As you know, Montana is a leader in the hunter safety program. We have had legislation for several years requiring that all young people must complete a course in hunter safety and be certified by the Montana Fish and Game Commission before they can buy a game hunting license. This program in Montana is carried out by volunteer hunter safety instructors, certified by the commission. These instructors volunteer their time and effort and have done a tremendous job. It is through the efforts of these public-spirited citizens that Montana has been taken into the 50,000 club. Through their untiring efforts, many young people trained in the attitudes and practices of safe hunting are going into the field to hunt. While this may not show any direct results for several years, it will be seen and felt as more and more hunters are trained.

All of us should take our hats off to these men who have worked so hard to train young people to enjoy more fully the out-of-doors.

Kokanee, or sockeye salmon, are one of the many game fishes in Flathead Lake.

Fisheries

Flathead Lake:

One of the large and important projects recently approved by the commission was the project for a very thorough study of Flathead Lake and its tributaries. The department has been studying some of the fisheries problems in the main parts of the Flathead River as they drain into Flathead Lake. We have been doing some experimenting with salmon in the area and also working on the lake trout in order to find some of the better methods of catching these fish.

It became obvious to the department that there has been a great deal of hit-or-miss work done on Flathead Lake. Only after a very thorough study is completed and all of the work that different people have done is drawn together can we expect to manage Flathead Lake so it will produce the very most for Montanans and their guests who enjoy this area every summer.

Some of the problems that we face on Flathead Lake are seemingly insurmountable. First of all we must map the lake so we have some idea of where the deep places are, where the reefs are, and location of places that are of special interest to fish. We have to know more about the food that is produced in the lake—food that will support fish. We need to know where the fish are habitually. This is extremely important in a large, cold-water body such as Flathead. We need to know also the relative abundance of various fish species, their growth rates, where they are spawning, and what we can expect from each species from the standpoint of what they provide to the fisherman's creel.

For example, let's consider the salmon. We know that at certain depths and temperature levels in the lake fishermen find salmon and can catch them. This area of abrupt temperature is called the thermocline and if we watch this thermocline carefully we can inform fishermen at which depths they will have the best chance to catch fish. We know that the salmon are now tending to get a little larger—but we're not sure why. Then of course, we need to note the manipulation of the water levels. We're quite sure that if those levels can be held at a certain elevation during and after salmon spawning we can expect more and better salmon in the lake. These are all the things we need to know.

The commission in approving the project also approved a boat of adequate size to work on the lake. Some people have criticized this and stated that the boat will be a pleasure cruiser. It's far from this. It is a working platform that will have booms on it to operate some of the netting gear, some of the sounding gear, and other equipment. There will be a cabin on it but only big enough for the wheelhouse. This boat is not designed for people to sleep on or to cruise around in. It is a work platform. We feel by approaching some of these problems on Flathead Lake in a rather uniform and coordinated manner, we can come up with some of the answers we have all thought about and searched for.

Another interesting thing about this study is that it's kind of a three-way project. The University of Montana at Missoula and Montana State University at Bozeman are both working on special parts of the project. We feel that the study will provide answers to some of the questions that sportsmen, especially from

the Flathead area, have been asking. It has been said, with tongue in cheek, that we are trying to find the Flathead monster and perhaps destroy an illusion. I assure you—we are not looking for monsters, we're looking for good sound information needed to manage a fishery. The monster is for the Flathead, not for the Fish and Game.

Fort Peck

The commission has approved a new project for Fort Peck Reservoir which includes two basic parts to exploration of commercial possibilities on Fort Peck and the sport fisheries potentials. We have enough evidence to lead us to believe that Fort Peck Reservoir will support a good, sound, basic commercial fishery which will be of real economic impact to the area, and at the same time a sound sport fishery which will not only benefit the area economically but will offer many, many days of recreation. We have evidence which leads us to believe that if the water levels were manipulated properly at given times of the year when the pike are spawning, we could have even a more tremendous fisheries for pike than we are enjoying right now on Fort Peck. We need to know where we could best have a commercial fisheries and where we could best have a sport fisheries only.

The lake is a large one and here again the project necessitates the purchase of a rather large working platform somewhat similar to the one for Flathead Lake. We know that with our findings we can better recommend to the Corps of Engineers how this lake level might better be held, and we'll be in a position to show that Fort Peck has within its depths both a very equitable and profitable recreation and commercial fisheries.

The brightly-spotted brook trout can be identified by the white bordered fins and vermiculations or "worm tracks" on its back.

THE TEN POUND BROOK TROUT LIMIT

Beginning May 22, 1966 Montana fishermen may legally take up to ten pounds of brook trout in addition to other limits of game fish. The reasons for the more liberal limit on these fish are tied to the pecularities of the species, their spawning habits and general body makeup and processes that are lumped under the term physiology.

The brook trout is not native to Montana. It was brought in from eastern states during the early days of railroading and distributed widely. Almost every stream straddled by a trestle was given a liberal sprinkling with "brookies." They are a good fish in numerous lowland streams, lakes and ponds where they attain a nice size. However, many small, cold headwater lakes and streams are overstocked with brookies, most of which are less than seven inches long. Here they have proven an undesirable introduction, for they have taken the place of other less prolific game fish which would grow larger.

The problem with brook trout eventually boils down to their spawning habits and the life processes that make them tick. They spawn in the fall, and at a more tender age than other trout. Many females mature as yearlings. Males less than a year old have been found ripe with milt. Both sexes may mature and be capable of spawning when only four inches long.

As a result. where there are good spawning conditions there are large populations of brook trout. Crowding means slow growth. Then too, brook trout are short-lived, particularly in small streams. There, individuals over four years old are very rare.

The end result is that in many areas there are large populations of brook trout which never live long enough to attain any size. Coupled with competition among themselves and with other fish species the brookies are "pan-sized" in most Montana streams and many high lakes. The best sized ones can be expected where competition is at a minimum and where natural factors do not allow them to near their natural reproductive potential.

There are other game fish in Montana which also spawn in the fall, but they differ in many ways from brook trout. Brown trout, for example, are older when they mature and spawn. They are not, therefore, as prolific as the brook trout. Brown trout are better able to survive the winters after spawning, not because they are older, but also because they are different physiologically.

For several years a limit on brook trout comparable to the new ten pound limit has been tried in south central Montana lakes, also in lakes of Mineral county and in several lakes west of Deer Lodge. Where

brook trout are nice sized, the poundage limit will keep the legal number of fish similar to what it has been in the past. Where brook trout are numerous and stunted the separate limit has allowed anglers to enjoy additional sport without harming the resource. With enough fishing pressure it may eventually help the growth rate of brook trout in these areas.

Brook trout with their colorful array of bright spots and strongly contrasting white-bordered fins are to many fishermen the most beautiful of game fish. The aroma that drifts from them as they sizzle and curl in a frying pan is exceeded only by their taste. They reproduce so rapidly and have such a high natural mortality rate that fishermen can be allowed to take goodly numbers of them without fear that they will be fished out.

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